

# BUYER'S GUIDE

# BUDGET GRAND PIANOS

Ready to buy your first grand piano and don't know where to start? **Danny Evans** samples a selection of instruments costing between £10,000 and £44,000



Steinway Model S: obvious mechanical excellence and finish

**B**uying a grand piano is one of the most important decisions a pianist will make in their career. With prices for a new grand piano starting at around £10,000, making the right choice is essential; but selecting the best value-for-money instrument in what Simon Markson of Markson Pianos in London describes as an 'increasingly competitive marketplace' can be a daunting prospect. With so many brands – from the US, Europe and, increasingly, the Far East – and a plethora of different models to choose from, where does one begin? The two immediate considerations are budget and size. Generally speaking, the bigger the instrument, the longer the strings and soundboard and therefore the better the tone. This guide examines instruments measuring between 5' 2" and 7' 6" in length and priced between £10,000 and £44,000. 'At the end of the day, you get what you pay for,' says Terence Lewis, managing director of Jaques Samuel Pianos in London; but researching for this article has revealed a wide variance in terms of quality within the price bracket across the different makes and models.

*N.B. Prices quoted throughout this article are those of the individual retailer unless specified as the maker's recommended retail price (RRP). Prices are correct at the time of going to press. Readers are*

*advised to check with their local dealer for current prices. Prices may vary according to the finish.*

## THE INSTRUMENTS

The independent dealer Markson Pianos is a regular stockist of many of the most famous piano brands, and had plenty of instruments within our budget. At the cheaper end of the price spectrum was the **Halle & Voight Pianoforce System 160**, measuring 160cm/5' 3" in length and retailing at £9,999. The sound was a little muffled, but less so than I had expected from an instrument at this price. The action was somewhat rattly and had a tendency to bang when played forte. However, as a practice instrument it was reasonably competent. The Pianoforce Performer player piano system, incidentally, is a MIDI-equipped music playback and record system with the option to record.

Moving up the price range at Markson was the **Yamaha C2M Grand Piano**, length 173cm/5' 8" (RRP £17,982). Yamaha is one of the most popular makes of piano in both upright and grand models, so a performing pianist is likely to come across one on their travels. In my experience a Yamaha piano rarely lets you down in any regard, whether you are using it for practice or performance. And contrary to the opinion that only pianos made by the great European makers have a

true 'personality', among the most individual-sounding instruments I have played have been Yamaha grand pianos of around 6' (183cm) in length. The C2M was no exception in this regard: I was immediately impressed with its strong bass, clear treble and responsive action. I played some Rachmaninoff and could really feel the power the instrument has to offer, and in soft passages it was possible to create a beautifully limpid cantabile. Its only shortcoming is that passagework can sound a little dull, and lacking a full and sonorous tone: that glassy ring one can produce on a fine Steinway is difficult to find on a Yamaha. Then again, the price discrepancy between a Yamaha and a Steinway grand piano is vast. Overall I was very impressed; the sound never becomes unpleasant or 'banging'. 'The Japanese are perfectionists,' says Markson. '[Yamahas] are produced to the highest level of craftsmanship – there's very good quality control'. This would also explain why Yamahas are so reliable.

At the upper end of our price bracket at Markson's was a **Steingraeber & Söhne A-170 (formerly 168)**, retailing at £36,999. I found the piano incredibly enjoyable to play. It seemed to create legato for you: there was no noticeable transition between the initial 'attack' on a note and its duration. Playing in a cantabile ▶



